DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 342 018 CS 213 202

AUTHOR Loofbourrow, Peggy Trump
TITLE Composition in the Context of the CAP: A Case Study of the Interplay between Assessment and School Life. Technical Report No. 58.
INSTITUTION Center for the Study of Writing, Berkeley, CA.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Jan 92
CONTRACT R117G10036
NOTE 33p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Environment; Educational Research; *Evaluation Methods; Grade 8; Junior High Schools; Standardized Tests; *Student Evaluation; Test Coaching; Testing Problems; *Testing Programs; *Theory Practice Relationship
IDENTIFIERS California (San Francisco); *California Assessment Program; Teaching to the Test

ABSTRACT

A study was designed to evaluate the interplay between the California Assessment Program (CAP), the broadest assessment California's students undergo, and one junior high school. The study was conducted at a racially and socioeconomically heterogenous school in the San Francisco Bay area. Observations were made on the school, department, and classroom level. Data included: written descriptions of the physical environment; documents including daily messages in bulletins; and field notes documenting CAP-related events. Eight different student writing activities were noted: (1) lecture; (2) directed discussion; (3) discussion; (4) group work; (5) reading original writing; (6) writing; (7) completing work sheets; and (8) unsolicited talking. The theme that emerged from the research was the competitive nature of the CAP. The single score is viewed as a reflection of the principal's leadership. As a result, the principal assumes the role of head coach, and attempts to educate the faculty and students about the importance, content, and results of the test. Language arts teachers are cast in the role of coaches to help students earn the best possible scores. Some students and teachers experience stress from the CAP. Only when assessment is viewed as a dynamic part of school life can the interplay between the community, faculty, students, and the community be understood. (Two figures are included; 28 references and an appendix on observational writing are attached.) (SG)

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WRITING

Technical Report No. 58

COMPOSITION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CAP: A CASE STUDY OF THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN ASSESSMENT AND SCHOOL LIFE

Peggy Trump Loofbourrow

January, 1992

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Carnegie Mellon University
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The publication of this report was supported under the Educational Research and Development Center Program (grant number R117G10036 for the National Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy) as administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. However, the findings and opinions expressed herein do not reflect the position or policies of the the Office of Educational Research and Improvement or the U.S. Department of Education.

This publication was produced on an Apple Macintosh IIsi computer with portrait display monitor and an Apple LaserWriter IIntx printer donated to the National Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy by Apple Computer, Inc.

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COMPOSITION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CAP: A CASE STUDY OF THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN ASSESSMENT AND SCHOOL LIFE

Peggy Trump Loofbourrow
University of California at Berkeley

Writing assessment research has traditionally revolved around issues of validity and reliability in a quest for tools that accurately, consistently, and efficiently measure achievement in this complex skill. Such research has largely avoided an examination of what happens when the test meets the school setting. What is the impact of an assessment on classroom life? The conventional wisdom is that testing drives curriculum, but how? Does it influence the structure of lessons? the relationships between administrators, teachers, and students? And reciprocally, what happens to the test itself when placed against the backdrop of the school? In fact, we know very little about the interaction between assessment and the school site. This study was designed to look at this two-way relationship. It is a qualitative examination of the interplay between the California Assessment Program (CAP), the broadest assessment California students undergo, and one junior high school. The question at issue: How do the nature of the school and the nature of the test interact to shape the life of one junior high school?

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

California's Approach to Curriculum and Testing

An effective writing program: the ideal. The California State Department of Education publishes a booklet designed for use by administrators and teachers that condenses much of the current theory and research on learning to write. This *Handbook for Planning an Effective Writing Program* (1986) presents the state's vision for an ideal school-wide writing program.

Such a program has a number of components. It encourages writing as a means of learning in all subject areas, provides students with a wide range of writing experiences in all subject areas, and helps students to discover that writing is a tool for thinking. It "builds on students' interests" and "provides adequate time on task." It treats writing as a process, with attention given to all parts of this process: prewriting, writing, responding, revising, editing, developing skills with the conventions of writing, evaluating, and post-writing. In such a program, "... students write for a variety of audiences and purposes." Students "believe that what they have to say is important" and "are motivated to write because they feel they have something significant to say." Finally, students in such a program "readily engage in revising and editing early drafts" and demonstrate "evidence of some enjoyment of the activity" (pp. 2-3).

In addition to providing California schools with a detailed description of an ideal writing program, the state has also implemented the CAP test, designed to hold schools accountable for instruction in all major curricular areas, including writing. The test is intended to reflect the ideals presented in the curriculum guide, but it has not been shown whether the exam, when nested in the school setting, accomplishes this goal.

What is CAP? The California Assessment Program is designed to provide comparison data between California's public schools. The test does not measure individual or classroom achievement, but provides only school- and district-wide information. CAP results receive a great deal of press attention and have been called the public school's report card. Although the CAP was legislated in 1961 to promote educational equality in the state, with the express intention of funding schools that demonstrate a need, school sites are instead given state money on the basis of good CAP scores, dubbed Cash-for-CAPS (Meyers, 1986).

The test is administered yearly in all of California's public schools. Different versions are given at the third, sixth, eighth, and twelfth grade levels measuring student achievement in a variety of subjects, including reading, writing, mathematics, history, and science. The present study concerns how the eighth grade test in general, and the direct writing assessment in particular, influences daily life in one junior high school.

The direct writing assessment is a relatively new (1987) addition to the primarily multiple-choice CAP. It is part of a growing trend to evaluate students' writing abilities by assessing their original compositions (Davis, Scriven, & Thomas, 1987; White, 1985). This advance is made possible by the creation of holistic scoring techniques. Scorers are trained, with a high degree of reliability, to independently agree upon the score of an essay, using lists of features and example "anchor" papers representing each score (Cooper, 1977; Diederich, 1974). Generally, California teachers consider the move away from multiple-choice writing assessment to the CAP direct writing assessment a beneficial one (Cooper & Murphy, cited in Dyson & Freedman, 1991).

The test, written by a team including California classroom teachers, was designed to reflect a broad range of writing situations and audiences. They wanted to move the California curriculum away from "the shopworn sentence/paragraph/essay sequence or ... formula, thesis-centered writing" to a wide range of discourse (Peckham, 1987, p. 6). The goal, then, was to create a test that would encourage teaching a variety of different kinds of writing for many different purposes and audiences.

In order to accomplish this end, the eighth grade test was designed to measure achievement in eight different writing domains: Story, Problem/Solution, Evaluation, Analysis/Speculation of Effects, Report of Information, Observational Writing, Autobiographical Incident, and Firsthand Biography. The team then worked to create a holistic scoring guide for each domain, including anchor papers that reflected each score, for distribution to all California writing teachers. Finally, classroom materials were developed that provided teachers with information about the domains, teaching suggestions, and sample prompts (Cooper, 1986). The express intention of this format is to move teachers away from merely teaching features common to all types of writing, such as spelling and mechanical correctness, to an increased emphasis on features important to a particular kind of writing. These changes are very important to this study. Because they are so recent, schools are struggling to interpret the changes and develop instructional methods that will result in enhanced scores on this new test. It is the match, or mismatch, between the intentions of the exam authors and the interpretations of the classroom teachers as enacted in the classroom which will be of particular interest here.

Although teachers are provided with nearly one hundred pages of materials describing the CAP domains and holistic scoring system (see Appendix for an excerpt from the Observational Writing packet), the test itself never asks students to identify a form or list its features; it merely asks students to respond to a "prompt," like the following:

The Group

Writing Situation. Every school has different groups of students. These students come together because of some common interest—sports, music, school activities. Think of a group of friends about your age. This group should be people you know fairly well, but a group you are not a part of.

Directions for Writing. Write about this group. If it has a name, give the name and the reason for the name. Explain what interest holds the group together. Describe some members of the group—what they look like and how they act. Tell about some adventures or activities of the group. Try to make this group come alive for your readers, who do not know anything about it.

Knowledge of the names or features of a domain is not tested, but the ability to read a prompt and write to it is. In fact, the preparation packets are expressly designed for teachers' use, not students'. However, as this report will demonstrate, some teachers on one campus, anxious to give their students any possible edge on the CAP, end up teaching writing in much the same way that these materials present it.

Approach to the Study: A Theoretical Rationale

This study is based upon the notion that all social structures, including schools, are, as Mehan termed, "interactional accomplishments," and the study of social structures is the study of interaction (Mehan, 1979). The school is a socially organized learning environment shaped by a host of individual players: each administrator and support staff member, each teacher, each parent, each student. "School life" is what takes place as these players interact with and play off one another. And each action and subsequent reaction are based upon how the players are interpreting what is happening around them. The perspective of each member of the school plays a part in shaping school life.

School and classroom life are important concepts because they are a large part of a student's context for learning. Cazden points out that learning is not merely a cognitive process; it is a social process as well (Cazden, 1982). A number of external factors may influence how and what a child learns at any given time. Besides the child's internal representations of knowledge, classroom life, which consists of teacher/student and student/student interactions, plays a part. For example, the participant structure of a lesson is an important feature of a student's context for learning, as it dictates who gets access to instruction and feedback and how (Phillips, 1972). The notion of an external context for learning, including the participant structure of lessons, figures into the design of this study. This research concerns how this context for learning operates in certain targeted classrooms, and if and how it is influenced by the impending CAP exam.

In addition, this study is based upon the notion that human interactions are effectively studied through language. Language is the primary vehicle through which individual interpretations of situations are enacted (Wells, 1981). Indeed, language is central to classroom life, for it is largely through spoken language that student needs are assessed by the teacher, lessons are communicated, and learning is demonstrated (Cazden, 1985). Thus, teachers' and students' interpretations of the requirements put upon them are enacted, in large part, through language. By examining the language itself, how it is said, and the accompanying nonverbal action of a classroom event such as a lesson, we can learn about how that environment is structured, how that structure influences what is taught and

learned, how the classroom members interpret one another's words and actions, and how the participants are feeling about the situation and even about themselves.

In sum, this study uses language as a foundation for looking at the school as a context for learning. It focuses on the relationships between the members of the school community (administration, teachers, and students) as they are touched by the CAP test, and how these relationships, so influenced, shape what is taught and learned. The CAP test, and the manner in which individuals interpret and carry out its demands, has become a part of this context for learning, and thus influences what is taught and learned in school and how.

METHODS

Site and Participants

The site of this case study was a San Francisco Bay Area intermediate school. Hillview (a pseudonym) serves 585 seventh and eighth graders in a racially and socioeconomically heterogeneous suburb of San Francisco. 327 students, or 56%, are Caucasian, 21% (124) are Black, 15% (85) are Hispanic, 5% (32) are Asian, and 3% (17) come from other ethnic minorities, including American Indian, Pacific Islander, and Filipino. The participants of the study included the students, teachers (particularly language arts teachers), and administration of Hillview. Language arts teachers are listed below, along with their teaching assignments:

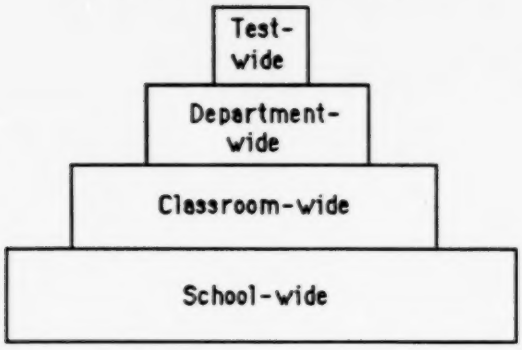
Teacher	Teaching Assignment
Dinah	7th level/GATE
Joan	7th level, below-level
Terri	7th level, below-level
Emily	7th GATE
Harry	8th level
May	8th level, below-level
Christine	8th GATE

(All names are pseudonyms. A student's level, or track, is determined by school personnel on the basis of his/her score on a standardized reading placement test. GATE is an acronym for Gifted and Talented.) Two language arts teachers were not observed, one who taught seventh grade GATE and one who taught eighth grade level and below level students, due to mid-year staff changes.

Data Collection

My goal was to look at the interaction between the CAP writing assessment and the school on four different levels of school life: the level of the total school community, the level of the language arts department, the level of the individual classroom, and the level of the testing situation itself.

Four Levels of School Life



On the school-wide level, I looked at the interplay between CAP testing and the life of the school, of which every member of the school community is a part. Data at this level included: written descriptions of the physical environment of the school—hallways, classrooms, etc.; documents including daily messages in the student and teacher bulletins, daily bulletin announcements to students and special memos to teachers; and field notes documenting special CAP-related campus events.

Department-wide, I examined how the department and the exam interacted with one another. For this phase of the study, I visited one writing lesson given by nearly every language arts teacher on the campus (with the exception of mid-year staff changes). Data here included field notes of lessons and department meetings, as well as teacher questionnaires.

At the classroom-wide level, I selected two eighth grade classes to be focal classes and receive visits throughout the school year. The first class was made up of twenty-eight "level" and "below-level" students, and the second class was comprised of twenty-six "gifted" and "advanced" students . And within these two classes, I selected three girls and three boys to follow during my classroom visits: two "gifted and talented" students, two "on level" students, and two "below level" students.

And finally, I carefully observed as the students in these two classrooms took the exam. Data at the classroom-wide and test-wide levels included field notes and audiotapes of lessons and teacher and student interviews.

Data Analysis

Promptly after collecting school-wide data each day, I typed out my hand-written notes, supplementing them with my memories and any audiotapes of the event. I then broke down the data into non-linguistic units, looking for recurring themes that played themselves out in the school and which illustrate the interaction between the school and the exam. These themes became my coding categories. For example, I noticed that a great deal of administrative language was used to "hype up" students and teachers to do their best on the test; thus "hype" became a coding category, a theme that ran throughout the data.

Field notes of classroom lessons were analyzed similarly. These notes were also broken into non-linguistic, thematic units, but these units revolved around the lesson the class was involved in at the time. I coded this data in two ways. First, I noted the nature

of the writing activity that the class was involved in. I noted eight different writing events, each with a distinct participant structure:

1. *Lecture* (about some aspect of writing), with the teacher doing almost all the talking. The students' role is limited to listening, taking notes, and/or asking questions to clarify something the teacher has said.

2. *Directed discussion*, where the teacher asks a series of "known answer" questions (Mehan, 1979), and looking for the students to produce the "right" answer.

3. *Discussion*, where students and teacher are involved in a more equal interchange of opinions and ideas. The students or the teacher may pose questions that, unlike a directed discussion, are not scripted, and which may not have a "right" answer.

4. *Group work*, where a portion of the class works on a project together without the constant presence of the teacher.

5. *Reading original writing*, either a student's or the teacher's, either aloud or silently.

6. *Writing*, where students are individually composing text of at least a sentence or longer.

7. *Completing work sheets*, where students are writing short answers in response to printed questions, and little composing is involved.

8. *Unsolicited talking*, where students are talking about their writing without the direction or consent of the teacher.

Of course, the writing activity a teacher chooses, and the participant structure inherent in that activity, provides evidence for a teacher's assumptions about the way students learn to write. I was interested to learn the origin of these assumptions, and whether or not the exam played a part in shaping or solidifying them.

Second, and perhaps most interestingly, I noted the primary teacher concern of the activity. Exactly which aspect of the complex writing process is the teacher addressing with this activity? This was determined by what the teacher said in assigning the activity, the aspect of the students' completed assignment that provoked teacher response, and the grading criterion, with emphasis on the latter. And, in the case of group work or unsolicited talking, what aspect of the writing process concerned the students? The questions and comments the students made were important here. My data revealed eight different concerns about the writing process:

1. *Generating ideas.*

2. *Form*, focusing on particular features of writing appropriate for a given purpose.

3. *Originality and/or word choice.*

4. *Mechanical correctness*, including grammar, usage, punctuation, spelling, and legibility.

5. *Length or completeness.*

6. *Time sponge*, where students are writing merely to fill a time gap in the period, with no apparent instructional focus.

7. *Organization.*

8. *Content.*

This second coding was useful for drawing several comparisons. Again, the concerns of the CAP materials and the teachers' concerns were analyzed for areas of match and mismatch. Students' concerns and the focus of the CAP materials were compared. And finally, student and teacher concerns about writing instruction were evaluated side by side. Interview data obtained from students and teachers was used to substantiate these analyses.

FINDINGS

The Exam Within the School: The Hype and Pressure of the Big Game

The theme that pervaded the school-wide data is the competitive nature of the CAP. CAP placed Hillview in competition with other schools in the district, schools in nearby districts, schools across the state in similar socioeconomic bands, and even its own past.

The principal as head coach. This competition was keenly felt by the principal, who stood to gain or lose the most from its outcome. Since CAP scores are not broken down by individual student or by a particular teacher's class, students and teachers cannot be held personally accountable for the scores. The single school score, however, reflects directly back on the principal's leadership. A teacher's standing or a student's record cannot be affected by the scores, but a principal's reputation can. The state and the public at large make their considerable interest in the results quite clear: the state through its Cash-for-CAPs policies and the public through extensive media coverage of the scores. Thus, the principal must motivate teachers and students to do well on the CAP, even though she is the one most directly benefitting from this effort.

Hillview's principal, Flo, therefore took on the role of head coach, taking time and effort to educate faculty and students about the importance, content, and results of the test. In the process, she attempted to improve faculty and student mood about an inherently unpleasant experience: students taking a battery of tests and teachers breaking from established routines to prepare students for these tests. As head coach, she must "scout," or obtain information about, the competition. She scouted other teams (schools), informed the coaches and players (students and teachers) of her findings, drew up a game plan, and even led cheers throughout the game. She attempted to create a school-wide hype like that before a big game, with corresponding motivation and pressure.

Although the test is not until April, Flo began her scouting efforts right at the start of the school year. Here is just one example:

> Teacher bulletin: September 27
>
> CAP results are in. Ours were a little disappointing. See articles on the counter. We'll discuss at Wednesday's meeting.

Accompanying this announcement were two newspaper articles, one discussing her district's falling CAP scores and one detailing her bordering district's rising ones.

At the following staff meeting, Flo distributed copies of the content area scores for Hillview and its district for the previous two years, expressing her concern about the downward trend. Flo went on to draw up a game plan encouraging the faculty to examine three possible explanations for the drop in scores: test-taking strategies, motivation/hype, and curriculum alignment (her terms). She suggested that teachers needed to address test-taking strategies more throughout the year, not just in the weeks preceding the test. She believed that there was adequate motivation/hype. She then instructed departments to look at the CAP information provided by the state and consider whether tested information is included in the curriculum. "I *don't* think CAP should dictate our curriculum. But I *do* think there is so much at stake that we need to make an effort."

Flo scouted the other teams—other schools in the district, junior highs in neighboring districts, and schools across the state with similar student populations—came up with a game plan to try to beat them, and tried to motivate the teachers to make the extra effort she feels is necessary to win.

Flo continued to try to keep the test in teachers' minds throughout the school year. She frequently distributed memos and informational packets to language arts teachers, and occasionally addressed the exam at language arts department meetings. She tried to offer teachers tips about the exam, such as a warning that too many erasures on the direct writing assessment could indicate cheating to graders and cause them to scrutinize that booklet. In addition, any time district CAP scores make the local newspaper, she clipped the articles and posted them for teachers to examine.

Of course, Flo's role as CAP head coach intensified as the test approached. Six weeks before the test, she wrote the following paragraph for the parent newsletter: "The California Assessment Program (CAP) Test is a state-wide test given to all 3rd, 6th, 8th, and 12th grade students in California each year. Our eighth graders have done well in the past and we are looking forward to another outstanding performance in April." During the April faculty meeting she presented photocopies of Hillview's results from 1985 to the present, informing teachers of Hillview's track record and her hopes for this year. She also encouraged teachers to use the practice tests and other improvement strategies. In fact, reminders to use the practice tests began appearing in the teacher bulletin three weeks before the test.

And then she led the cheers. During the week of the test, she altered the physical environment of the school in an attempt to create a positive mood about the test. Signs were posted throughout the school that read "Zap the Cap." Students were given special pencils engraved with the phrase "Zap the Cap." Teachers were given special signs to post on classroom doors when the test is in progress; they read "Quiet, testing. Zap the Cap." Flo's messages to students in the daily bulletin began two weeks before the test, and continued daily through the day after the test. These announcements stressed the importance of the test, as well as the expectation that the eighth graders would do well. For example:

4/19/89

8th GRADERS—CAP TESTS

CAP testing is next week, April 25th and 26th—only two days this year!
Be sure to get rest and stay healthy. Get ready to ZAP THE CAP!

4/24/89

8th GRADERS—CAP TESTING

On Tuesday and Wednesday you'll be taking the most important test of the year—the CAP test. The results of this test are printed in the (local newspaper). Our test results have been good for the last two years. Let's make headlines this year by really Zapping the CAP. You can do it!

Student bulletin messages on the day of the test implore the eighth graders to "Knock 'em dead!"

These pep-talks, along with the note in the parent newsletter and free "Zap the Cap" pencils to eighth graders, were intended to influence parent, teacher, and student mood about Hillview in general and CAP in particular. The implied message was that Hillview is a good school because, at least in part, it earns "good" CAP scores, and that the test should be welcomed by parents and students because it provides an opportunity to show the community and the state that Hillview is a good school.

Department-Wide Influences: Teachers On the Defense

If the principal's role could be likened to that of a head coach, the language arts teachers were asked to be coaches, helping the students to earn the best score possible in their subject area. But these coaches specialized in defense, scouting the offense of the test and coaching the students to counter it. In other words, language arts teachers who were anxious to get CAP scores up began by getting as much information as they could about the test, and then designed a curriculum that would help their students score well on it.

At the beginning of the year, seventh and eighth grade writing teachers were given well over 100 pages of preparation materials provided by the state. Language arts teachers were expected to scout the test, using the these materials provided by the administration, and to make sure there was "curriculum alignment," in Flo's words, with its contents. They were expected to use these materials in whatever manner they thought would be of help to their students in April.

The observed language arts teachers accepted their roles as defensive coaches, but with varying degrees of enthusiasm. All four eighth grade teachers held review sessions one week or more preceding CAP. All the eighth and three of the four seventh grade teachers said they integrated at least some of the CAP writing domains into their curriculum. Two eighth grade language arts teachers, Harry and Christine, also posted special CAP bulletin boards displaying the writing domains, Harry's listing the eight domains and displaying model student papers of each, and Christine's detailing the features of each domain. However, a third teacher, May, commented to me, "The first year I did that (taught writing based on the CAP) I was so worried, have I covered this, have I covered that, and then I looked at the topics, and I thought this is, what a waste of time." May believed that the students did not need to know the names of all of the CAP domains, but the information the students needed about the form of the writing was included in the test prompt itself.

However, a universal goal among the language arts department faculty was to get CAP writing scores up, and thus, regardless of their enthusiasm, they acted as defensive coaches. For example, at a language arts department meeting at which teachers were to vote on a new literature textbook series, considerable discussion centered on the competing

textbooks' explicit attention to the CAP writing program. In fact, CAP writing and grammar instruction were the only two composition issues addressed when selecting the literature text.

And of course, the coaches felt the hype and pressure of the big game. One of my target teachers, Christine, reported to me, "With the CAP essay suddenly I'm very aware that Johnny doesn't know how to do that (write a problem/ solution essay) and there's a good chance Johnny is gonna get that kind of essay. And in order really for the school to have a good reputation I want Johnny to ... I feel a lot of pressure also because I have the advanced class, and these kids are relied upon to help bring the scores up and carry it, and that puts a lot of pressure on because I have the two advanced classes."

This resulted in language arts teachers making curricular decisions for their students based primarily on the content of the test, not the students' needs and interests. In fact, five of six language arts teachers who were interviewed or responded to the questionnaire indicated that they constructed special lessons to give their students practice in writing CAP-like essays.

Although different teachers seemed to have somewhat different definitions of CAP-like lessons, all of these lessons shared three important features: each fit neatly into one of the eight CAP domains; each lesson imposed a topic on the student without choice or input, with obvious concern for the needs and purposes of writers in that age group, but without concern for the needs and purpose of the individual student; and each was one to two pages in length. Dinah, a seventh grade teacher, instructed her students to write a short essay about "three things that they believe in that make them do what they do in their lives." This was a CAP-like essay. It fit neatly into one of the domains (analysis/speculation of effects), it was short, and it was an imposed topic. When a student asked if her essay must be true or if she could "make it up," the teacher answered, "This is Mrs. S's (Dinah's) class. You can make it up! Sometimes it's hard to think of creative things to say in all of these essays!" Clearly Dinah would rather the student practice the designated form than write something personally meaningful—similar to taking the CAP.

Although all observed teachers assigned CAP-like essays (as defined above), they differed in the language they used to talk about writing. All the teachers used a vocabulary common to all writers, including terms like introduction, conclusion, topic sentence, etc., but the teachers varied in the degree of explicit attention given to labeling the CAP domains and describing generic features of each domain. The seventh grade teachers at Hillview often assigned CAP-like essays without explicitly identifying the CAP domain they were based upon. In the assignment in Dinah's class described above, the teacher did not attempt to label the domain being practiced or explicitly describe the features of the domain. Instead of talking in generic terms about the type of essay the students must write (domain) and the features of this type of essay, she dealt with this information by discussing with the students what they needed to accomplish in this specific assignment: "In this essay, how are you going to ... bring the reader in, grab him?"

Three of Hillview's eighth grade teachers were far more explicit in their description of the CAP domains and the features of the domains. They took Flo's mandate for "curriculum alignment" with CAP very seriously, aligning their language with the language of the test and test materials. For example, one lesson in Harry's eighth grade level class began with this directed discussion:

Harry: There's a thing I'd like you to write down today. I'd like you to look at the board across the way. (On this board are pasted construction paper "bubbles" with the words Report

of Information, Autobiographical Incident, Problem Solution, Memoir, Story, Evaluation, and Analysis.) Think of which writing style you used when you used an adjective to describe Sam and you wrote an evaluation of it.

Student 1: Description.

Harry: (Quietly to student) Raise your hand.

Student 2: Report of Information.

Harry: No.

Student 3: Analysis.

Harry: No.

Student 4: Autobiographical.

Harry: No. Sandra?

Sandra: Evaluation.

Clearly Harry was working with his students on being able to identify the CAP writing domains. The assumption here seems to be that if a student can recognize a prompt as coming from a certain domain, and has knowledge of the features of that domain, he can write a better response to the prompt and thus earn a better score on the CAP. This is an assumption that seems to be shared by other language arts teachers at Hillview, but has questionable theoretical merit (see Britton, 1989; Scardamalia & Paris, 1985).

Basing their writing curriculum on the test posed other problems for the teachers. One teacher noted that all of her students were not yet ready or able to write to some of the CAP domains, and yet she felt she must cover all eight domains in order to prepare students adequately for the test. In this type of program there is no overt incentive for teachers to assign longer pieces of writing; in fact, busy teachers charged with teaching literature and writing in one classroom period may have to choose between covering all eight domains and working on longer, more involved pieces. And there is no incentive for creative teachers to move outside those eight domains into other types of writing or into writing that blends features of two or more domains for a specific purpose.

The whole notion of purpose and audience in such a test-based program is also blurred. The CAP prompts sometimes include instructions to write for a particular purpose to a particular audience, but that particular audience is not really going to read the papers—teachers are. The teachers and students at Hillview were very aware of this, as this student question asked during the CAP test indicates:

Sean: This says the audience is my classmates. Do I have to write to my classmates?

Christine: Yes. Pretend that your classmates will be reading it, but remember a teacher will be grading it.

A true purpose or audience is not an important test feature, nor was it an important part of the curriculum of the teachers at Hillview. Most often no audience was mentioned

in assigning writing. Occasionally "someone" became the audience, as in this teacher's instruction, "Try to convince someone that your method of solving the problem is the best one there is." In one of the lessons I observed, the teacher made up a fictional audience, but in reality the only person reading the piece was to be the teacher.

Occasionally, other students supplemented the teacher as audience, but usually in an evaluative manner. For example, May, one of my target teachers, regularly paired students to read one another's first drafts, instructing them, "Don't hesitate to write on their papers if there are any errors." In Christine's class, the students were required to read their stories aloud to the class, but they were only told of this after the stories were completed. No mention was made of this when the story was assigned, so as the students were composing they believed that, like for their other assignments, their only audience would be their teacher. Then, when they read their papers aloud to the class, the class was encouraged to be an evaluative audience, as in Christine's comment, "The more compliments, the better that person's grade is going to be." In later assignments in this class, students were asked to read and score one another's papers according to a CAP-like scoring guide, and Harry mentioned that he used this type of assignment as well. All the teachers often posted some examples of student work, but, with one exception, students were only told that their papers would be posted after they had been graded. For almost every teacher and assignment, audience figured very little in the writing process, and purpose was limited to completing an assignment for a grade.

Clearly the language arts department at Hillview took their roles as CAP defensive coaches very seriously, struggling to achieve "curriculum alignment" with the test to help their students achieve the highest possible scores. They selected textbooks based, in part, on the content of the test; they construct CAP-like writing assignments, and some even taught the terminology of the test. These teachers were designing curriculum around a series of two-page essays that fit neatly into one of the eight specified writing domains. Unfortunately, the limitations of the test had become the limitations of the curriculum. The teachers had become more concerned with giving students opportunities to practice each of the eight identified domains, rather than giving students choice in their writing and opportunities to write about subjects that were important to them, or forms that were appropriate for their abilities. They had examined the test and the materials that accompany it and designed a curriculum around those materials, or reworked their existing curriculum to meet those specifications. The extreme result of this type of defensive teaching is classroom time and pupil attention being shifted away from writing to a specific audience for a specific purpose to learning a list of generic forms of writing, the features of these forms, and how to recognize when one is being asked to write one of these forms.

The Exam Within the Classroom: Two Different Coaching Styles

Although given a plethora of preparation materials, language arts teachers at Hillview were free to individually interpret and enact those materials in the manner they felt best. Consequently, each teacher took a different approach, based upon her training, experience, and the caliber of students in her class. Each teacher had thoughtfully considered her goals—better writing and better CAP scores—and had devised a strategy for achieving them. Following is a close look at the different approaches of two of Hillview's eighth grade language arts teachers, Christine and May.

Christine: CAP, the year-long season. Christine, the eighth grade GATE teacher, had been teaching for six years, three years in elementary schools and three years in the eighth grade GATE core program (language arts and U.S. history combined) at Hillview. Christine's training in writing instruction included district seminars in minimum proficiency writing and holistic scoring, and then in CAP writing, as well as seminars put

on by textbook publishers that emphasize incorporating reading and writing. Christine placed CAP writing at the heart of her writing curriculum year-round, and her writing instruction mirrored the CAP teacher materials described earlier:

Teacher: Stop, change gears. Think for a moment. We've talked about all of the different types of essays, story being one of those (in reference to an earlier comment that the students would be writing stories as their next writing assignment). Would you list for me the other types of essays. (Writes story on board.) Story is one. What's another?

Student: Autobiographical incident.

Teacher: Good, autobiographical incident. What's that? (Writes autobiographical incident on board under story.)

Student: (Student offers a definition.)

Teacher: Good. What's another type of essay?

This short example is typical of a number of directed discussions the teacher conducted throughout the year. It exemplifies her theory and practice of teaching writing in a number of ways.

First, the primary teacher concern of this discussion seems to be form. Christine apparently believed that if her students know the eight domains by name, know the features of the domains, and can identify a prompt as coming from a particular domain, they would be able to write better, particularly in a CAP writing situation. Second, she believed that it is important to teach these domains, or forms, in a general way, and then teach situations in which the form may be appropriate—form before purpose. And finally, her chosen writing activity, directed discussion, indicates that she held the authority over and knowledge about writing, and her role was to transmit this knowledge to her students. She viewed writing as a body of knowledge to be learned, and herself as the transmitter of that information. These assumptions are apparent repeatedly in the data. Christine's formulaic approach to writing instruction closely matches the way writing is presented in the CAP teacher materials, and thus her assumption that this may be an effective way to teach writing may reflect her interpretation of these materials.

Christine assigned many CAP-like essays throughout the school year. Her CAP-like essays not only had the three features common throughout the department (one to two pages, fitting neatly into one domain, with an imposed topic), but her focus on explicitly labeling the features of the particular domain was even more extreme. In addition, she had the students write several timed, one-draft-only essays where the students must write to CAP prompts.

I observed seven writing projects in Christine's class between January and April. Of those seven projects, the teacher only required a second draft on the first, a story. The story was also the only project for which the students were given ample time (six weeks) and a lengthy piece was expected. Sean and Mary, my target students, wrote beautiful stories, highly acclaimed by their classmates and teacher, which were eight and fifteen pages long, respectively.

Most of Christine's writing instruction, however, was directed toward the goal of effective writing in a timed situation where only one draft is possible. Christine often

referred to writing as if it is frequently a timed activity, as in the CAP. She talked about having only an hour to write an essay as if this were a common time constraint, which, in academic situations, may be the case (essay tests, standardized tests, etc.). Occasionally, when in the thick of preparing for the CAP, her concern for time outweighed her concerns for content. In one instance, Christine advised her students to begin working on their conclusions even though they may have more to say on the topic, because "It's best to make the essay look finished, even if you're out of time."

Christine's attention to time was apparent again when she taught her students prewriting techniques. The predominant technique emphasized in her class was constructing a "mind map," a prewriting technique where the writer quickly jots down his ideas and uses lines to connect those that go together. In the following example, Christine was not talking specifically about the CAP but in general about situations where students use writing:

> But if you had a whole hour to write your essay, and you could take ten minutes for prewriting, you know that time into prewriting is going to pay off later in the essay ... Rough drafts take too much time. Testing and things like that don't allow you to do a rough draft. But you have time for prewriting. Some mind maps, some outlines. I have no preference. Although to be honest with you, I didn't really learn how to outline until I was in college, or at least high school.

In six of the seven writing projects I observed, Christine substituted instruction in mind-mapping, a quick planning technique, for drafting, because multiple drafts are time consuming.

On two occasions, Christine assigned an in-class essay and instructed the students to do no writing during the first seven minutes of class, only a mind map. She then had the students hand in the mind maps to be graded along with the essays. After one such occasion Christine commented, "Some of your mind maps included basic ideas and that's it. No details. Your mind maps should have enough information that you should be able to write the essay from the prewriting." Teaching her students the correct way to mind map was so important to Christine that on two occasions she had students mind-map an essay, turn in the mind-map for a grade, but never write the essay.

Once again, some of Christine's assumptions about writing instruction are clear. She not only maintained the authority over the written product but the process as well. Christine instructed students to do mind maps before writing, and the maps were evaluated on the basis of how closely they conformed to her standards, not how well they helped the writer accomplish his or her purpose. And again, Christine's overall concern with form before purpose is evident.

The point here is not that mind mapping is an ineffective prewriting technique; indeed, Mary found it helpful on several occasions that year. Instead, the fact that mind-mapping is the prewriting technique emphasized in Christine's class indicates her interpretation of the CAP. There are numerous prewriting techniques available to a writer—observation, reading, interviewing, and discussion to name a few—but these techniques are not available in a test situation, while mind mapping is. With few exceptions, mind mapping is the primary prewriting technique observed in Christine's class. And, were it not for her concern about prewriting in a timed situation or prewriting as a substitute for drafting, a wider variety of prewriting techniques that may meet the needs of greater numbers of student writers could have been explored.

Christine's concern with timed writing seemed to be a defensive coaching move: she had scouted the test in advance and prepared her students for its unfamiliar offense. Another way she prepared students defensively was by teaching them what CAP prompts are, and how to read them and write to the proper domain. Christine also taught the students the importance of writing directly to the prompt:

> Student: Do you have to do autobiographical incident? The teacher said yesterday that we didn't have to do the essay about ourselves.
>
> (Teacher answers that when students receive a prompt like this, they must answer in the first person, particularly on tests.)

Of course, since a CAP essay that is not written to the prompt receives no score, Christine emphasized the importance of writing directly to the prompt. "Pay attention to what style of an essay it's asking for—include all of the elements of a good essay using that style."

On another occasion, a student asked what he should do if he had nothing to say about a particular prompt. The teacher replied, "Make one (an essay) up, because you write to the prompt." And later, when students were asked to write about an incident that happened to them, she said, "I'm getting some good questions from some students. Can we lie? Can we exaggerate, tell about something that happened to someone else? You can, but you have to convince your reader it is an autobiographical incident, because this is the form of the prompt. Of course you like to write about a real incident, because these are usually most convincing. But no one said that it has to be true, but you have to convince your reader that it really happened to you." The students were not to allow the prompt to trigger another idea that may be more meaningful to them.

Finally, Christine tried to get her students to look at their writing from the point of view of a CAP grader. She took several class periods to train the students in holistic scoring. First, she lectured them on holistic scoring, then conducted a directed discussion of anonymous essays, and had students read and score essays written by members of another class. The unsolicited talking during the scoring exercise indicates that students were less concerned with the discrete features listed on their holistic scoring guides, (originality, details, word choice), than with giving a swift overall score to each essay.

> Tina: We weren't supposed to correct for grammar though.
>
> Matt: Yea we were. Paragraph structure and stuff.
>
> (Discussion. I gave it a two, you gave it a four.)
>
> Tina: This is good.
>
> Matt: I gave it a six.
>
> Mary: He didn't even finish this.
>
> Sharon Bl.: I gave it a one. Everyone else gave it a two.
>
> Mary: I'll give it a two.

Following this exercise, the teacher asked the students what they learned from their experiences. One student answered, "It teaches us how you feel when you have to grade all these essays," and another student commented, "The handwriting was really poor."

Christine was trying to help her students look at their writing from the CAP-graders' point of view in terms of organization, vocabulary, and mechanics, but the students' comments indicate that they were concerned with how unpleasant reading a set of essays is for a grader. They did not seem to enjoy reading the essays, and they assumed the teacher did not enjoy it either. The students looked for and commented on features which make the unpleasant chore of reading a group of essays more tolerable, such as handwriting.

This example is a window into the students' attitudes toward CAP writing training (see Loofbourrow, 1990 for others). They viewed writing as a teacher-mandated assignment to be completed for the purpose of a grade. They saw the teacher's role in reading their papers as an unpleasant, evaluative chore. School writing, in this situation, seemed to have lost almost all of its communicative purpose.

Clearly, Christine's interpretation of the demands of the CAP, which was colored by her individual training and experiences as an English teacher, dominated her writing program. Writing was taught as a subject to be learned rather than a tool for use. Christine held the authority over the purpose, process and product, while students had little control over what they wanted to communicate and evaluating their own success at achieving these goals. Christine taught the eight domains explicitly, taught strategies for writing in a timed situation, and even taught students how their essays are evaluated by CAP graders. The students viewed writing as a subject to be learned, and looked upon reading another student's writing as an evaluative chore, not an exercise in understanding and communication.

May: CAP in its season. May interpreted the demands of the CAP in a very different way. May had had eighteen years of experience teaching secondary students, with numerous years teaching language arts. She had also attended many professional seminars on writing instruction, including the Bay Area Writing Project. May's approach to writing instruction focused on projects she had found successful with students, with CAP writing taught only in the few weeks before the test. Thus, although she taught to the test during the CAP "season," the bulk of her writing program is the result of her years of experience in the field.

May assigned her students many papers that are not strictly CAP-like. One such assignment was a "club paper" that she had used year after year. Students were instructed to create a fictitious club and write an advertisement for it, specifying the requirements for membership and persuading potential members to join. Although this assignment was similar to a CAP-like essay in that it is one to two pages long and on an imposed topic, it does not fit neatly into one of the eight domains. May also gave her students time to complete the piece. She spent about thirty minutes on prewriting activities, including explaining the assignment, reading papers students from past years have written, and reading a paper she herself had written on a club called "The Women's Poker League." She then had the students begin a first draft in class, which the students completed for homework. May had a policy of offering extra credit for students who read papers aloud to the class, so students were aware of a possible audience for their writing. Furthermore, students regularly met in cooperative learning groups, so they knew that at least a few other students would be reading their work. The next day, students met in their cooperative learning groups where they reviewed one another's papers using a checklist the teacher had provided. Following these response groups, the students composed a final draft, begun in

class and completed at home, which many subsequently read to the class for extra credit. Papers were graded on the basis of the number of mechanical errors.

This assignment typifies May's theory and practice of teaching writing. May began by giving her students a purpose for writing, in this case, to persuade a potential club member to join a club, and then let the form of the student's essay unfold from this purpose. Students were not taught lists of features of any type of essay, but were asked to perform a communicative task toward a particular goal. Writing definitely had a skills component to May, as her grading policy reflects, but she also believed that it is meant to be read and enjoyed, and she therefore allotted ample class time for students to read drafts and final copies in either small groups or to the entire class. In fact, time was taken with each phase of the process: generating ideas, drafting, response, revision, and sharing the finished product with interested listeners and readers.

It was only in the month before the CAP that May began coaching students for the test. May assigned a "report of information" paper where she taught the students this CAP label. She had her students collect data about their family's television viewing habits for one week, then had them report on their findings. However, her instruction differs from Christine's in that she did not teach the features of the report of information genre outside of the context for its use; for May, form springs from purpose:

Teacher: What are some things you can tell me about the information you collected?

Student: I watched a lot of t.v.

Teacher: OK, how about your feelings about the amount of time viewed. I feel my family watches too much t.v., my family doesn't watch too much t.v.. Whatever your feelings are, I want you to back them up.

John: Areas most frequently viewed.

Teacher: (Adding this to her map on the board) You're getting this all copied down, aren't you? Tom.

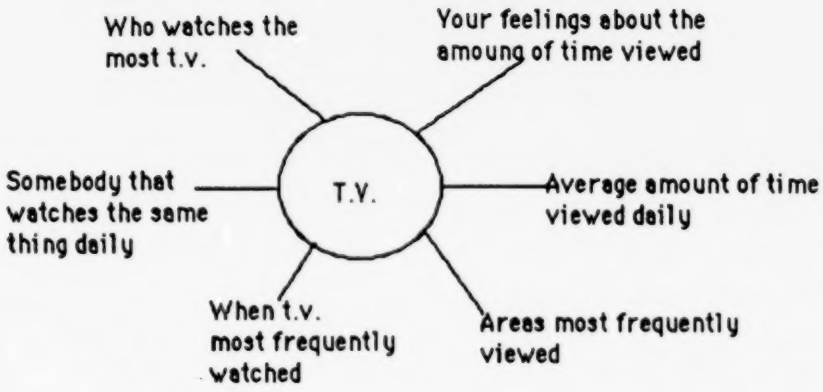
Tom: Where? Where are you viewing?

Teacher: That type of information is not on your log. Erika.

Erika: I was going to say, who viewed most of your shows, but that's not on the log either.

Teacher: How about, when t.v. is most frequently watched? And what about the type of show most frequently watched? (Writes these down.)

John: What kind of show interests you.


Who watches the most t.v.
Your feelings about the amoung of time viewed
Somebody that watches the same thing daily
T.V.
Average amount of time viewed daily
When t.v. most frequently watched
Areas most frequently viewed

In this assignment May, like Christine, used a mind-map, although here the mind map was not used as a speedy drafting technique, nor as a tool for recalling the features of a domain, but to organize the information the students had collected into chunks that could become paragraphs in an essay. The concern here was not with time or the form of a domain, but with form springing out of this particular set of data for this particular purpose. And, like May's other assignments, this report of information paper was done over several days and two drafts, with opportunities for peer response between drafts and after the finished product.

The CAP played a part in May's classroom in a couple of additional ways. It clearly provided incentive for writing to be assigned more frequently. In March, she commented that she hadn't done any writing for a long time, but she promised she would do an assignment the following week because, "I've got to start getting ready for CAP." Also, May's instructional emphasis on mechanical correctness seems to be reinforced by her interpretation of the exam. Each of the papers she assigned was graded similarly; typically first drafts received ten points for completeness, and final drafts received twenty points for completeness minus one point for every mechanical error. At one point in the semester, May read a paper to her class that is so poorly written as to be unintelligible, admonishing students to proofread their work. On another occasion, May commented that her students' papers were "so bad" in terms of mechanical errors that her students had to do a third draft to correct the errors. Indeed, her markings on student papers almost exclusively concerned mechanical errors. May believed that mechanical correctness is a major component of CAP scoring, as in the statement to her students, "The key to getting a good grade on this CAP thing is proofreading. Some of you are not going back over your papers."

Overall, however, the CAP was downplayed in May's class. May articulated her philosophy of the CAP and writing instruction:

> I think too much emphasis is placed on it (the CAP), I really do. The kids are real geared up. You know, it's so hard to teach, how many domains, eight? It's so hard. And I think that when they do get their subject (test prompt) that they're to write on, it's, they don't have to know which domain this is, it's (the prompt is) self-explanatory.

Thus, the CAP plays a subtle role in May's classroom. She taught writing in drafts and provided a true audience for student writing, despite the fact that the test requires neither. May had made a conscious decision not to teach lists features of each CAP

domain. Her reliance on short (one to two page) papers written on an imposed topic may be more the result of years of experience teaching language arts at the eighth grade level than her interpretation of the CAP; however, the CAP provided no incentive for her to break out of this pattern into longer papers with more student ownership of the topic, purpose, and audience. Although CAP materials did not emphasize mechanics, May seemed to think that CAP scores were heavily based on mechanics, and thus her interpretation of the CAP reinforced her practice of grading on that basis. The CAP also provided incentive for her to teach writing and assign essays in each of the eight domains.

Clearly, the observed classroom-wide effects varied according to each teacher's experience in the field and interpretation of the demands of the CAP. While Christine understood the CAP teacher materials to evince that writing is best taught in the explicit, formulaic manner presented in these pamphlets, May focused on getting her students to write fluent, grammatically correct pieces on topics that interested them. In both cases, the CAP did not provide incentive for writing to a genuine audience for a genuine purpose, or for writing lengthy pieces; indeed, timed writing became a topic of its own in Christine's class. However, the CAP seemed to provide incentive for teaching writing in both classes.

TAKING THE EXAM: PRESSURE TO PERFORM

Teamwork in Competition

The administration of the eighth grade CAP test is the culmination of two years of preparation by teachers and students. The written products prepared in forty-five minutes by eighth grade students form the basis for the department's reputation in writing instruction, both within the school community and the public at large. There had been a great deal of administrative hype in the weeks before the test, and students and teachers alike felt pressure to perform.

For some students, any testing situation is accompanied by stress. For James, one of May's below-level students, the CAP was no different, "I was worried about whether I was going to do all right on the test or not." However, the fact that CAP scores are not reported individually seemed to reduce the pressure of this test for other students. Sean, one of Christine's students, discussed the anxiety he felt during the CAP: "I wasn't really worried about it because I pretty much already had my (high school) placement and they told me it wasn't going to involve my placement and so I didn't, the only thing I was worried about was getting a good grade for my parents, and for me, to satisfy my own needs, but my dad gets mad if I don't do well on tests."

Likewise, teachers do not receive scores for their classes, but some teachers still feel performance pressure. Christine commented: "I feel a lot of pressure also because I have the advanced class, and these kids are relied upon to help bring the scores up and carry it, and that puts a lot of pressure on because I have the two advanced classes." This shared sense of pressure influenced the relationships in the classroom. Students and teacher were working together toward a common goal, and this bound them into a team. Christine consciously cultivated this altered relationship:

> ... at the end (of the exam) what we often do is to take the essays and say, ok, what was your topic and what did you write on and how did you do on that? And we usually compliment each other. We don't say, oh you blew that one. We say instead, boy, that was a difficult writing assignment, and it sounded like you handled it real well. So every person is a team member and that helps ... They each know they have to carry the ball or it falls. So I use it in that direction.

However, teachers and students were not strictly on the same team. Teachers must not only play the role of coach during the test, but they must referee it as well. Teachers are charged with proctoring the exam and making sure state-mandated guidelines are followed; at the same time, it is in their best interest that students score well on the exam. It is difficult for caring teachers who want their students to have a successful writing experience to play both roles. In a few extreme cases, some California schools have been charged with actually "doctoring" examinations. Although there is no evidence that such tampering went on at Hillview, Hillview teachers faced other lesser, and probably more common, ethical dilemmas.

The most minor ethical dilemmas were over whether to answer questions about spelling and grammar. For example, students are not allowed to use dictionaries during the test, so students often ask the teacher how to spell a word. The teacher would not spell the word outright, but instead decided to answer yes or no questions about spelling, or provide a set of clues to help the student spell the word:

Gabe: Does difficulty have two F's?

Christine: Yes.

Gabe: Is this theirs? (thiers.)

Christine: All the theres begin with the—it's what comes after that that differs. (Gabe corrects.) Yes.

Student: How do you spell consequences?

May: (Does not spell it but pronounces it very slowly: con-se-quen-ces.)

Students concerned over their CAP performance occasionally asked questions about grammar. Once again, how much and what type of help to provide was a dilemma:

Tina: Should it be, or am I, or was I? Past?

Christine: Perhaps you should ask the question who I am? Put it in the present.

A more difficult ethical dilemma both target teachers faced is whether to give help in reading a prompt. An essay that is not written to the prompt receives no score, so teachers want to make sure that students understand and write to their prompts. When a student has a question about a prompt, the teacher sometimes gave him a clue to the answer, or even gave the answer outright:

> Tom's prompt asked him to describe what would happen in an earthquake, and how people's lives would be changed. He asked May if he should talk about how to prevent earthquakes. May instructed him to read it again.
>
> A girl asks Christine about a prompt, which asks her to write about traditional ceremonies. She asks Christine if this could include routines, but Christine says it is asking more about ceremonies, like Christmas, etc.

Finally, sometimes the students understood the prompt but wanted help in thinking of ideas to write about. This posed the most difficult dilemma: whether to provide such help, and how much help to give:

Sharon: What if I'm not sure what career I want to be?

Christine: Then do something unorthodox, like a clown, or a garbage collector. Maybe say why most people wouldn't want to do this, but that you see positive aspects to this career. Take a humorous view.

And later, the same student asked:

Sharon: Do you think I have to pick a specific career or just describe what I like to do?

Christine: I don't know what you mean.

Sharon: I don't know what specific career I want to have, but I know what I want to accomplish.

Christine: You could write about that. Many people have created their own careers, based on the things they want to do. Or you could be a professional student.

Here, the teacher went beyond giving clues and hints or helping the student explore her own ideas; the teacher was suggesting ideas outright. The teacher's desire to help her students, and the fact that teacher/coach and student/player share the same goal, made it difficult for the teacher to shift to the role of impartial referee.

Here again the reciprocal influence of the nature of the classroom on the exam is demonstrated. Student and teacher roles within the classroom had been solidly established in the months preceding the test, following the traditional student/teacher roles and expectations established in the first grade, and were therefore extremely difficult to alter, even for one hour. And yet, for the sake of fairness and accuracy of outcome, the administration of the test required that the roles be altered and that teacher/coaches who are accustomed to being on the same team as their students now act impartially. The fact that they had difficulty doing so highlights the reciprocity of influences of the classroom and the test.

The experience of taking the CAP test not only altered student-teacher relationships and put teachers in ethical dilemmas, it was a frustrating experience for the students as well. First, some students were frustrated by the fact that the topic is imposed with no choice. When asked how he felt he did on the exam, Sean commented: "I didn't feel very good about it because I didn't, I really hated my topic. It wasn't very interesting and I couldn't really use my imagination much and that's one of my strong points ..." Not only was the topic difficult for Sean, but the idea of writing to an imaginary audience was as well. Sean was conscious that his real audience was the CAP reader:

> I was trying not to, um, I was trying not to make it, make fifth grade out to be this piece of cake easy thing.... I was actually trying to impress the judges by not being like totally stuck-up eighth grade and fifth grade is so easy.

Although three of my target students did not like their prompts, three of them did, and when the prompt asked the student to write about something that was meaningful to him, the student felt better about his written product. One of May's on-level students, Mark, was a comic book collector. He read many comic books, wrote letters to comic book publishers, and even wrote his own comic strip. He even wanted to write comic strips professionally when he grows up. When he received his prompt, asking him to write about a busy place, he immediately thought of his first comic book convention, which he had recently attended:

> I started, see, I went to a comic book convention, so I wrote about that, and it was a busy place. That was my first one, about two weeks ago. OK, busy place, I wrote that down, and I wrote down comic convention, because that was mostly on my mind, so I wrote that down, and I wrote down everything I was gonna do there, from the um, flier, and I went from there to write this part right there, people selling comic books was this part right there. I did a little bit of animation right there and I had all this right here, animation, famous people, exhibits, booths, I didn't get to.

And Mary, one of Christine's students, felt that writing to her prompt helped her to understand and appreciate another person: "... It just made me have a little bit more respect for her."

However, the students who felt good about their prompts and felt that they had something to write about also felt pressed for time. Mark complained that he didn't get a chance to write about the booths at the comic book convention: "... Although they didn't give me enough time, because I was right here and I wanted to talk about something else. I was right here and it was time to go so I just wrote that (the conclusion) down." Mary, who had written a beautiful fifteen-page story earlier that year, felt that she did poorly on the CAP because of the time constraint:

> I'm not good at shortening my stories. I like to go on forever and I like to take all the time I need ... Well the problem was starting, and then, 'cause I only had like one draft of it, I couldn't have a rough draft and then like that, I went back to trying to, you know, get the thought in my head and then trying to fix it in my head, and then I kind of lost what I wanted to put down.

Thus, the pressure to perform and the nature of the test came together to create a frustrating situation for some teachers and students. Teachers who wanted their students to do well for the student's sake, the teacher's sake, and the reputation of the school found themselves in ethical dilemmas while administering the test. Their responses to these dilemmas illustrate the mutual influence of the nature of the classroom on the test itself. Students taught to take time to think, to plan, and to revise, and students who take pride in their work, dislike having to turn in less than their best effort in a testing situation, and this frustration is compounded by the hype surrounding the CAP.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion of Policy Issues

As stated in the outset of this paper, California State's *Handbook for Planning an Effective Writing Program* (1982) illustrates a model writing program, according to current theory and research. Likewise, the CAP direct writing assessment is considered to be one of the most sophisticated evaluative tools available. However, when the CAP is enacted in

school settings, several points of tension between the test and the handbook become apparent.

First, the handbook stresses writing as a means of learning in all subject areas, and that schools should provide students with a wide range of writing experiences in all subject areas, and helps students to discover that writing is a tool for thinking. The CAP program tries to address this goal by testing eight modes of writing for eight different purposes. The CAP teacher materials further provide suggestions for incorporating each domain into different subject areas, such as science or history. However, the test itself examines science and history and all subject areas in a multiple choice format. In Hillview's case, the language arts department is charged with teaching all eight writing domains. Other departments do not even participate in discussions of writing education or evaluation. The CAP direct writing assessment has not in this case had the intended result: a shift from writing being viewed as solely the language arts teachers' domain.

The handbook recommends that students write for a variety of audiences and purposes. However, the CAP test is only read by teachers and is only written for a score. Both target teachers at Hillview incorporated a peer audience into at least one writing assignment (although in Christine's case the students did not know they would have a peer audience for their stories until after the writing process was complete, and could not use this knowledge during composing). However, no observed writing assignments in the target classrooms or the wider department involved an audience outside of the classroom, or a purpose other than a grade.

The handbook further prescribes a writing program that builds on students' interests. Students should "believe that what they have to say is important" and should be "motivated to write because they feel they have something significant to say." However, the CAP exam randomly imposes topics on students. The writing assignments observed at Hillview within the two target classrooms and department-wide were exclusively designed around teacher-imposed topics. The teachers tried very hard to make the topics interesting, but student choice was not a feature of the assignments.

According to the handbook, students should be provided with adequate time on task, but the CAP assessment allows students only forty-five minutes to plan, compose, revise, and edit their essays. The two target teachers differed in their response to this glaring contradiction between the handbook and the test. While all of May's assignments involved two class periods for writing and revising, as well as two nights at home to finish what was not completed in class, Christine felt she had to prepare students to write in a timed situation for the CAP, and she therefore committed much of her writing instruction to timed in-class essays.

The backbone of the handbook's recommendations is that writing be treated as a process, with attention given to all parts of this process: pre-writing, writing, responding, revising, editing, developing skills with the conventions of writing, evaluating, and post-writing. But the CAP direct writing assessment does not evaluate students' processes, only a written product, and in fact does not allow adequate time for the writing process. In the classroom, the teachers found it difficult to devote the time and attention needed to cover all eight writing domains and teach writing as a process. May chose to cover fewer domains and require multiple drafts of each assignment; Christine covered all the domains, but only expected multiple drafts of one story.

Clearly, the points of tension between the handbook and the test point up the difficulty teachers have in implementing the model writing program and preparing their students for the CAP. Because of the great pressure for top performance on this test,

teachers may institute a test-like curriculum, rather than one modeled after state recommendations. The closer the test itself can match those recommendations, the fewer points of tension will occur, and this will translate into more consistent, more sound classroom writing instruction.

Discussion of Pedagogical Issues

The highly explicit nature of the CAP teacher materials, and the reality that these materials are making their way into some intermediate grade classrooms, brings up a fundamental question about how writing is best taught and learned at this level. How do learners acquire knowledge of genre? Can intermediate grade students learn explicit rule systems for a variety of genres, and can they make use of these rules in their writing? What alternatives do teachers have for explicitly teaching genre to intermediate grade children?

Some research has found that instruction in text structure for middle grade students does not improve writing quality. Research conducted by Scardamalia and Paris (1985) looked at the effects of explicit instruction in the structural components of opinion essays on reading and writing. They note that studies comparing recall protocols of mature (older, more expert) writers with those of immature (younger, novice) writers indicate that mature writers rely on their discourse knowledge during the writing process. Mature writers' protocols include words like "introduction," "example," "position," "conclude," etc., indicating that attention to discourse features helps them plan, organize, and flesh out their writing (p. 5). Immature writers, on the other hand, do not make use of such terms. Their writing is characterized by the questions, "What should I say next?" and "How should I say this?" (p. 7). Scardamalia and Paris call this the "knowledge telling" writing strategy, characterized by student writers using first the topic, and later previously written text, to help them think of what to write next. There is an absence of global preplanning and an absence of explicit use of text structure in facilitating the writing process.

Scardamalia and Paris researched whether student writers could be taught explicit discourse knowledge, whether such knowledge would facilitate their writing (help them to answer the "What next?" question), and the differences between mature and immature readers' representations of text. They offered explicit instruction in eight discourse functions (e.g., reason, example, elaboration) of an opinion essay to fourth and sixth grade students. In comparing pre- and post-treatment essays, the researchers found that, although students did become familiar with the structural terms, could mark these elements in their own text, and could attempt to use some of the more mature structures learned, "... there were no significant differences in rated quality of texts that could be attributed to instruction," whether general quality of writing or coherence in particular was measured (p. 21). "In fact, negative consequences to quality and coherence of text were associated with the familiarization-plus-instruction group" (p. 37). The results of this study indicate that children can be explicitly taught text features, but some evidence suggests that when their attention is drawn away from what they are trying to write (content) and drawn to how they are writing it (form), children do not write better—they may write worse.

Other research indicates that learners can acquire a sense of genre in a much more context-bound way. Britton (1977), in a discussion of this issue, quotes the results of a study by Freedman, Carey, and Miller (1986) which examined how adult students acquired a new academic genre:

1. The learners approach the task with a "dimly felt sense" of the new genre they are attempting.

2. They begin composing by focusing on the specific content to be embodied in this genre.

3. In the course of the composing, the "dimly felt sense" of the genre is both formulated and modified as (a) this "sense," (b) the composing processes, and (c) the unfolding text interrelate and modify each other.

4. On the basis of the external feedback (the grade assigned), the learners either confirm or modify their map of the genre (Freedman, Carey, & Miller, 1986, cited in Britton, 1988).

Britton suggests that children, as well as adults, learn rhetorical forms from their necessary function and purpose, and that in fact purpose drives the learning process.

This is an alternative to explicit instruction in genre features: instruction that focuses on the communicative purpose of the written product. The key difference between the "communicative purpose" paradigm and the "explicit knowledge" paradigm is that, in the former, text features are a logical outgrowth of the communicative purpose of the particular language use, while in the latter, these features exist outside of any particular context or purpose and can therefore be studied generically. Langer, in her study of children reading and writing (1986), proposes that, in the minds of children, "use shapes text" (p. 32). She notes that the children in her study defined story and report differently, wrote them using different organizational patterns, and recalled them using different structures:

> The children tended to organize their retelling of stories around the original top level sequences, just as they were more likely to use sequences to structure their own story writing. Titles, on the other hand, were much more likely to be included in the retellings of reports, just as titles or "main ideas" were more likely to be used as a top level rhetorical structure in report writing. (p. 48)

She concludes that "... the structures children use to present and remember their stories and reports are logical, systematic, and directly related to ways in which they are perceived to be useful" (p. 32).

Research in writing instruction is beginning to address these opposing paradigms directly. A recent research study compared fifth and sixth grade classes which had received one of four instructional treatments: instruction which emphasized text structure, instruction which emphasized creating a communicative context for children's writing, instruction which used a combination of these techniques, and a control group which followed the textbook (Raphael, Englert, & Kirschner, 1989). Text structure instruction consisted of instruction in key words and phrases of a particular genre, as well as questions that writers of that genre should answer through their texts. The communicative context instruction focused on creating an audience for student work through peer editing and publishing. The third instructional treatment combined features of both groups. Students' metacognitive knowledge about writing, as demonstrated by their response to questionnaires, was shown to increase according to the instruction received: the text structure group became more aware of key words, phrases, and questions relating to a particular genre; the communicative context group became more aware of audience, purpose, and different aspects of the writing process; and the third treatment group demonstrated growth in both kinds of knowledge. However, the study did not attempt to measure the resultant quality of the writing these students produced.

There are great gaps in the research on this issue. It is unclear at what point in the developmental process that learners can make productive use of specific knowledge of text features. Furthermore, much of this research has been conducted with middle grade students. Further research needs to be conducted specifically with junior high school students to determine how instruction can best enhance their knowledge about writing and their written products.

Conclusions

What is assessment? Clearly, this study demonstrates that assessment is not simply an autonomous procedure, but is a human event, influencing and influenced by the dynamics of school life. It is a complicated social, linguistic, and cognitive process with great potential to impact the functioning of the school community.

In the classroom, it is the interpretations of the members that are at root causal (Erickson, 1986). The CAP exam and preparation packets introduce a new element into this interpretive environment. The test and accompanying materials are designed to be on the cutting edge of writing assessment. Thorough, meticulously detailed packets accompany the test to inform teachers about what the CAP will test. why, and how. But teachers receiving these materials interpret them through their own perspectives, which are influenced by their education and experiences teaching language arts, as well as the input of the wider school community (administrators and colleagues). Their interpretations are further influenced by broad sociocultural factors, such as the school's reputation, or history in the neighborhood. Their interpretations may in the end differ significantly from the CAP writers' intentions. Thus, teachers' interpretations of the demands of the test and the preparation materials become salient, not the content of the materials themselves.

Furthermore, as these interpretations are enacted in the classroom, the underlying learning task structure is influenced. Erickson (1982) defines the underlying learning task structure as the combination of the subject matter task structure, consisting of subject matter information and content, and the social task structure, consisting of status sets and roles of the various members of the classroom. Both the academic content of the lesson, and the social participant structure underlying the lesson, are shaped by teacher interpretations of the demands of CAP.

This interplay was exemplified in the two target classrooms in this study. Christine's classroom demonstrated the outcome of one possible interpretation of the CAP materials. Christine had carefully studied these materials, which explicitly describe the eight writing domains to be tested by the CAP, defining each domain in general terms, specifying its particular characteristics, delineating it from the others being tested, and suggesting its possible uses. Christine, looking to these materials for clues as to how to get her students' CAP scores up, interpreted them to indicate that writing should be taught to junior high school students in much the same way it is presented in the materials. Of course, her interpretation is further influenced by her particular training and experience in writing instruction, chiefly district seminars in writing assessment and serving on holistic scoring teams.

Her interpretation of these materials in turn influenced the underlying learning task structure of her writing lessons. The content of the information she provided to her students mirrors the information in the preparation materials. This further influences the participant structure of the lessons. The teacher transmitted information about writing through lecture and directed discussion. Students took notes and tried to plug their writing into one of the eight formulas. The teacher (and ultimately the CAP materials themselves) held the authority over the form, purpose, and even, to some extent, content of the writing.

May interpreted the same materials in a different light. She brought to her interpretation many years teaching writing and language arts, as well as her training through the Bay Area Writing Project. She believed that if she taught writing the way she always had, stressing fluency and grammatical correctness, her students would be adequately prepared for the test, and the subject matter task structure in her class reflected this point of view. The social task structure of her writing lessons allowed students to share some of the authority over the writing (minimizing lecture, using learning partners for composing, revising, and editing, offering extra credit for reading papers out loud to the class). Her decision to steer away from teaching students lists of genres and their features, save a couple in the month before the test, influenced the underlying learning task structure of her class.

Standardized testing in literacy education is one component of a paradigm, described by Langer (1984), which has dominated the field in this country for the last one hundred years:

> [Literacy education in the United States] is structured around a relatively consistent notion of instruction, one that defines relatively clear roles for teacher and student. In this view, knowledge is conceptualized as a body of information to be transmitted from teacher to student; the role of the teacher is one of organizing that knowledge in as logical and efficient a manner as possible; and the role of the student is one of remembering what has been imparted. This view carries with it its own technology to organize the knowledge to be transmitted (textbooks and accompanying exercise material) and to monitor the success of the enterprise (through unit tests and the apparatus of standardized testing). (Langer, 1984)

The problem with this practice is the underlying assumption that the outcome of literacy education is a body of declarative knowledge which the teacher transmits to the students, and that can be measured on a state-wide exam. As long as such a paradigm dominates, notions of the student's goals driving the instructional activity and the teacher as the facilitator of a process rather than transmitter of knowledge, theoretically considered important components of literacy education, will not be priorities of practice (Applebee, 1986).

Clearly, educators need to know how an assessment influences the school outside, as well as within, the stated goal of the program (Davis, Scriven, & Thomas, 1987). To accomplish this, assessment cannot be solely studied in isolation, apart from the settings in which it is introduced. Assessment tools must also be studied in the context of the interpretive school and classroom environment. It is only when assessment is viewed as a dynamic part of school life that the complexities of the interplay between the community, faculty, students, and test can be understood.

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Appendix:
Excerpts from Preparation Packet on Observational Writing

Observational Writing focuses on what the writers have seen. It re-creates or re-presents remembered experiences. The writer's stance in Observational Writing is that of observer, rather than of participant. In Observational Writing, students may write about what they have learned about a school or community activity after one or more observations; they may profile community figures (after interviewing their subjects and the people who work with them); they may write up their extended observations of an animal or plant; or they may take a close look at a particular place that has special importance to them.

... Although Observational Writing is based on personal experience, it is different from Autobiographical Incident and Firsthand Biography in that it is more distant and impersonal, less expressive and more presentational. Like Firsthand Biography, Observational Writing may focus on a person, but the presentation of the person, whether well-known or not, will be more objective, requiring the writer to adopt the scientist's objective eye ...

[The characteristics of observational writing include:]

Identification of Subject: Writers clearly identify what they have observed, the subject of the observation.

Observational Stance: Writers convey their observational stance through their focus and point of view. They convey this stance by the details they select and the words they use to present their observations to the reader.

Context of Observation: Writers locate the subject of the observation in a specific place and time.

Presentation of Observational Experience: Writers re-create their observations by selecting and ordering details, using factual descriptions as well as such other strategies as dialogue; concrete, sensory language; narration of event; and shifts between closeups and distant views.